

Review

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the international context if he were better informed on the Irish context.

Emmet O'Connor

Dermot Keogh and Andrew McCarthy, **Limerick Boycott, 1904: Anti-Semitism in Ireland** (Mercier Press, Cork, 2005), 163pp, €20pb

On Holocaust Day 2003, Minister for Justice Michael McDowell apologised, yet again, for Ireland's refusal to accept more than 60 Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1946, while the Nazis were exterminating Jewish people in occupied Europe. This was two days before the Supreme Court decision that overturned the process whereby migrant parents of Irish citizen children were entitled to apply for residency to keep 'care and company' to their citizen children. The minister, within whose constituency lies the once Jewish South Circular Road area of Dublin, also boasted on the same occasion that Ireland's Jewish people had never experienced antisemitism, as he was planning the 2004 Citizenship Referendum that would abolish the *jus solis* citizenship for all children born on the island of Ireland. I am making this link with Irish state race and immigration policies because I believe that the position of the Jewish minority is a seismograph of racial politics, even though Jewish people – in contrast with Travellers, immigrants and people of colour – are not the current target of the racial state. Nor is this link merely contemporary. In their detailed study of the 1904 Limerick boycott, Dermot Keogh, author of the seminal *Jews in Twentieth Century Ireland* (1998), and Andrew McCarthy explicitly make such a link, contextualising the Limerick events within the rise of antisemitism in Ireland. They remind readers that even in 1892, during the consecration of the Dublin Hebrew Congregation, Ireland was described by the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire as 'the only country in the world which cannot be charged with persecuting the Jews'. However, while the 19th century Irish administration did not actively persecute Jews, I would argue (as does Dermot Keogh's 1998 study) that the Irish state's consistent refusal to admit Jewish refugees during World War II does indeed amount to state antisemitism.

The present study, however, returns to the notorious earlier antisemitic outbreak in Limerick, where a small Jewish community, mostly from Lithuania, and many of them working as travelling peddlers who introduced the hire-purchase system to Ireland, was met in January 1904 by the determination of one young Redemptorist priest, Fr John Creagh, to rid Limerick's poor folk of what he saw as 'Jewish usury'. Fr Creagh's antisemitic sermons, which covered Jewish history and alleged Jewish trading practices, incited a backlash against Limerick's Jews as Redemptorist confraternity members turned on Jewish families. A week of unrest followed with police deployed to protect the Jewish families. Creagh's follow-up call for an economic boycott of Jewish traders resulted in violent attacks, but, more significantly, in economic ruin for most of Limerick's Jews,

most of whom left Limerick, and in the demise of Limerick Jewish community, never to recover.

This study does not go over any new ground not covered by Manus O'Riordan's and Pat Feeley's 1984 study or by Keogh's own 1998 comprehensive book. However, what it does do is accompany the brief narrative with a selection of documents hitherto not in the public domain, mostly sourced from the files of the Chief Secretary's Office in Dublin Castle, enabling students and amateur historians to view copies of primary sources – articles, handwritten letters and reports, and letters to the editor.

But, more interestingly for me, the book raises several key issues. The first is the question the authors raise of whether – since the term involves widespread antisemitic violence and killings – the boycott deserves the title 'Limerick pogrom'. The authors are probably right to conclude that the term 'boycott' is more apt, but that in the minds of Limerick's Jews, who had fled Lithuania, where news of pogroms had been widespread, the term 'pogrom' came naturally once they found themselves under attack. However, when I raised this question several years ago with Gerald Goldberg, the former Lord Mayor of Cork, he insisted that the term was pertinent and had to be preserved.

The second issue indirectly raised by the book is whether, having established the Workmen's Industrial Association in order to keep 'the poor independent of Jewish usurers', Creagh's main intention was the abolition of the system of credit trading in order to protect Limerick's poor, or whether his motivation was antisemitism. The authors do not – perhaps cannot – answer this question, but they certainly demonstrate that the debate was kept alive in articles and letters to the editor at the time. And the question is important both for labour historians and for race scholars, and deserves further analysis.

Finally, a third issue, again raised but not sufficiently developed in this book, is the support of nationalist Ireland, particularly but not exclusively through Arthur Griffith and his *United Irishman* for Creagh's antisemitic rants. Reading Griffith's articles, which espouse blatant antisemitism and racism, helps us to make a direct link between 'the father of the nation' (and arguably the father of Irish racism), the Irish government's subsequent failure to offer a haven to Jewish refugees before, during and after World War II, and the current policies of the Irish racial state.

Ronit Lentin

Máirtín Ó Catháin, **A Wee Black Booke of Belfast Anarchism (1867–1973)** (Organise!, Belfast, 2004), 44pp, £6, pamphlet

Captain Jack White, **Misfit: A Revolutionary Life** (Livewire Publications, Dublin, 2005), 262pp, €14.99pb

In his obituary of Belfast-born anarchist John McGuffin in the *Belfast Telegraph* in 2002, Eamon McCann related the tale of a trip to Dublin in the late 1960s in the company of McGuffin and one of the fabled Chicago Seven, the American anarchist Jerry Rubin. As they approached Newry,

McGuffin told Rubin that the town was an anarchist stronghold. Down were playing Kerry in the All-Ireland football final that weekend, and the town was awash with red and black flags (the colours of both Down GAA and international anarchism). To complete the picture, banners were strung across the street reading 'Up Down': 'These people really got the revolutionary ethic', gushed the impressed American. This story, albeit qualified as 'completely unbelievable', finds its way into the interesting and frustrating booklet, *A Wee Black Booke of Belfast Anarchism (1867–1973)*.

Had Newry, Belfast or anywhere else in the North really embraced the political red and black, then this book might have had a story of substance to tell. Unfortunately for the author, he is forced to deal with scraps, which results in a scrappy, though often illuminating, read. Máirtín Ó Catháin is clearly aware of its limitations and admits that the wee book is 'uneven in places, sketchy on context, and optimistic in analysis.' (Note: the booklet contains no page numbers, which is why page references are not given here). Optimism in analysis is entirely acceptable; less so is the wishful thinking that sometimes emerges to fill the historical gaps. For example, in his discussion of Belfast anarchism in the wake of Scottish anarchist John McCara's visits in the early 20th century, Ó Catháin writes that anarchists (*if* they existed and when not ignored), 'would *probably* have been seen as beyond the pale...*Undoubtedly*, however, there were others...inspired by anarchism...*If so*, John McCara had played an active and important part in that process'. [emphasis mine] While such brickmaking without straw may make anarchists feel better, which is clearly the aim and not necessarily a bad thing, it makes for poor history.

This is 'a story of small movements and peripheral figures' presented 'as an account of how Belfast produced and received anarchist activists'. The emphasis is on individuals rather than groups, and six potted political biographies form the core of the narrative. Following a brief contextual chapter, Ó Catháin deals with anarchism in the late 19th century and its 'production' in the US by William Baillie of Belfast and Bolton Hall of Armagh. Hall, who emigrated with his family in 1867, became a follower of Henry George's 'back to the land' movement and founded the seventy-five acre 'Free Acres' libertarian commune in New Jersey. He combined his communalism (which involved publishing several books, including one on Tolstoy) with class-struggle anarchism, supporting industrial struggles and becoming an organiser with the Longshoreman's Union. William Baillie, likewise, synthesised the individualist and anarcho-communist streams of the tradition. He was drawn to the libertarian socialism of William Morris and became active in the Socialist League following his emigration to Manchester in the 1880s. He moved on to Boston, where he wrote for Benjamin Tucker's *Liberty* and published a biography of individualist American anarchist Joseph Warren. Despite his strong association with the individualist tradition, Ó Catháin argues that 'he was one of the few anarchist thinkers to make the case for an inseparable link between what most of his

contemporaries considered diametrically opposed trends of anarchist thought – the egoist or Stirnerite anarchists and the collectivist and/or communist anarchists. This was because he saw the greatest personal freedom of the egoists encouraged in the freedom of economic equality'.

In the 20th century, we hear about the aforementioned John McCara, who came to Belfast from Scotland as an anarchist propagandist in the early years of the century. He was arrested for making a seditious speech from the Custom House steps and spent three months in Crumlin Road gaol. The inclusion of the giant of Irish anarchist history, Captain Jack White, is 'tenuous', but justified on the basis of his many visits to the city and death there in 1946. The booklet concludes with accounts of the anarchist activities of 'Slumdom' Jack McMullen and John McGuffin. McMullen, an ATGWU shop steward and former Belfast Independent Labour Party member with 'anarchist tendencies', was a colourful propagandist who railed against 'superstition, bigotry and class ignorance' from the self-same Custom House steps in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as being a prominent activist in housing and unemployed struggles. The final subject, John McGuffin, is given the most extensive and best treatment. A founding member of the Belfast Anarchist Group (BAG) in 1967 and a prominent militant in People's Democracy, McGuffin was another colourful maverick, though here we have glimpses of organisational history also, particularly the short-lived activities of BAG. Following his internment in 1971, his politics became increasingly imbued with republicanism (he was buried in a tee-shirt reading 'Unrepentant Fenian Bastard'!). Memorably described as an 'intellectual hooligan', he termed himself an 'anarchist-republican-Guevarist.' McGuffin is probably best known for his books *Internment* (1973) and *The Guinea Pigs* (1974), which, as Ó Catháin rightly notes, 'have stood the test of time', as detailed critiques of state repression in Northern Ireland.

Misfit: A Revolutionary Life contains a full reprint of Jack White's partial autobiography *Misfit* (1930), four articles he published in 1936–7 on anarchism and the Spanish Revolution, and a short biographical essay by Phil Meyler sketching White's career after 1916, when *Misfit* ends. (Meyler's piece is lifted, almost in its entirety, from Kevin Doyle's 2001 biographical essay on White on the Workers' Solidarity Movement website). White is probably best known as the initiator of the idea for and early organiser of the Irish Citizen Army in 1913. The son of the 'hero of Ladysmith', Sir George Stuart White, he was born in County Antrim in 1879. He followed his father into the British army and was decorated for his role in the Boer War. He then served as aide-de-camp to his father, who became Governor of Gibraltar, and following stints in India and Scotland, resigned his commission in 1907 and worked in Canada and Bohemia, before joining the Tolstoyan Whiteway anarchist commune in Gloucestershire. His sarcastic description of the purists there debating 'whether it was lawful to support the State by putting a postage stamp on a letter' while the 'more mundanely minded did the cooking and the washing' (p. 91) will ring some bells with many a former communitarian. From

Whiteway, he wrote a letter to the *Ulster Guardian* on the bigotry and stagnation of Ulster unionism, and with the death of his father in 1912, he got 'into the thick of the fight in Ireland' (p. 94). He headed for Ballymoney, County Antrim 'to chase that most elusive of all hares, the spirit of '98' (p. 114), where he organised with other Ulster Protestants against not just the lawlessness of Carsonism, but its 'lovelessness'. He shared a Home Rule platform in Ballymoney with Roger Casement. The publicity generated by Ballymoney saw him invited to Dublin, where he shared a platform with John Dillon and Tom Kettle and criticised the ejection of heckling suffragettes. The 1913 Lockout was underway, and Catholic priests were blocking the efforts of strikers to send their children to homes of British sympathisers. In the North, he writes, 'I had raised a protest against the perversion of Protestantism to deny political freedom to a subject nation. In the South, I broke away from politics down to the real fight in indignant horror at the perversion of Catholicism to deny even the freedom to control their own children to an economically subject class...I saw red; and when I see red I have got to get into the fight' (pp 138, 140). He proposed the formation of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), and trained and drilled its first recruits. He left the ICA at the strike's end and became an Irish Volunteer commander. With the outbreak of the First World War, he kitted out a field ambulance and went to France with an Australian ambulance unit. It is unclear how long he remained in France, but by April 1916 he was in Wales attempting to organise a strike of miners in opposition to the execution of Connolly and, consequently, was jailed for sedition. *Misfit* concludes with White being transferred to Pentonville prison on the eve of Casement's execution there.

This story of an unusual Irish 'Warrior, Rover, and Rebel' contains much of historical interest; unfortunately, the reader is forced to endure much self-indulgent pseudo-philosophising and theological rambling, as well as overlong extracts from various newspapers, in order to find it. Phil Myler (though Kevin Doyle deserves the credit) then takes up the story from 1916, describing White's embrace of communist/socialist republican politics in the 1920s and early 1930s, as he moved between Dublin, Belfast and London. Following activism with the unemployed in Belfast and with Republican Congress, he went to Spain with a Red Cross ambulance crew in 1936, where he was impressed by the social revolution and the politics of the anarchist CNT-FAI (not least their anti-clericalism). He wrote 'A Rebel in Barcelona', published in the CNT-AIT information bulletin in November 1936; 'Anarchism – A Philosophy of Action' and 'The Church: Fascism's Ally' (*Spain and the World*, 5 February 1937 and 5 March 1937); and the pamphlet, *The Meaning of Anarchism* (Freedom Press, 1937), a response to the May Day events in Barcelona – all of which are usefully reproduced here. On his return to Britain in 1937, he was active in the anarchist Freedom Group and worked on a survey of Irish labour history from an anarchist perspective with the Liverpoolian anarchist Matt Kavanagh. He returned to Ireland on the eve of the Second World War and died in Belfast in 1946.

Donal Ó Drisceoil

Myrtle Hill, **Women in Ireland: A Century of Change** (Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 2003), xi + 335pp, £14.99pb

This is the first history to be written of women in 20th-century Ireland – a daunting task for any historian, given that we still know relatively little about the detail of women's lives, whether private or public, during this century. Myrtle Hill, however, has provided an accessible and useful history utilising much of the current research available on the subject and adding to those sources by delving into the archives. The book is also beautifully produced and has wonderful illustrations and a good bibliography.

Throughout the book Hill charts the social, political, and economic conditions that shaped women's lives, explores the ways in which those lives changed over the century and integrates the history of women in the North as well as in the South of Ireland. Hill sets the history of Irish women within a strong contextual framework of 20th-century Irish history, making them part of that history, rather than separate from it. She includes their involvement in what are recognised as the major political events such as the Rising, the War of Independence, the Civil War, the two World Wars and the conflict that developed in the North from 1968. Women's political involvement and protests on issues such as the 1935 Conditions of Employment Act and the 1937 constitution are noted, as are the development of the women's movement in Ireland from the 1970s. There is no doubt that much of the history of women in 20th-century Ireland is a history of their bodies. Restrictions, particularly in the South, on contraceptives, divorce, abortion, and the battles raged on these fronts attest to the significance of attempted State control of the actual bodies of women. Indeed, much of the history of the women's liberation movement reveals an attempt to provide women with greater control over their physical bodies and their material conditions. While the impact of legislation governing moral behaviour is addressed, and some comparisons are made between the situation in the North and in the South, not enough is noted about the differences in attitude between the two States on these issues and the ways in which politics and religious adherence shape attitudes. How similar was the Northern Ireland Criminal Law Amendment Act (1923) to the Free State's Act of 1935? What did the relevant debates say about the place and role of women in society?

Hill is strong on the history of women in Northern Ireland and gives due attention to the politics of feminism and the role of women in the conflict that engulfed the North from 1968. She discusses the role of women in community politics and the levels of co-operation, or lack of it, that characterise local politics in Northern Ireland. Issues of class rarely surface in this work. Diane Urquhart's recent study of women and political activity in Northern Ireland in the early twentieth century shows how significant class was on women's expectations and participation in Ulster political life. How significant a factor did that remain in the later 20th century and, indeed, how significant is class in the formation of women's organisations in the south during the century? This book covers a lot of ground. However, while trying to